

# The Nebraskan

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**Weather:** Warm and breezy weather is to continue as today will be partly cloudy and warm again with a high of 91 (33C). Tonight will be slightly cooler with a 30 percent chance of evening thunderstorms and a low of 57 (14C). Mostly sunny and not as warm for the weekend with highs ranging in the 80s (29C).  
Barb Branda/The Nebraskan

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## Ak-Sar-Ben more than horseracing

### Buglers don't blow their own horns

By Lise Olsen  
Senior Reporter

Twelve minutes before post time, the Ak-Sar-Ben bugler marches out in front of the scoreboard and plays the "Call to Post."

Nine times on weekdays and 10 times on Saturdays and Sundays the music-box-like performance is repeated.

Decked out in a gold jacket, white bloomers, black boots and a black riding hat, the Ak-Sar-Ben bugler revives a tradition discarded by most tracks. Five years ago, Ak-Sar-Ben hired an Omaha music teacher, John Kool, as its first bugler in twenty years. A year later, Joel Edwards, a former music teacher took over for Kool and has been the principal bugler ever since.

"People still ask if it's a recording and I go out there and mock it," Edwards said.

Edwards, who received his masters in speech pathology and audiology from UNL last August, arranges his schedule around Ak-Sar-Ben's racing schedule. Edwards, a member of the Omaha musicians union, also plays at the Omaha Civic Auditorium and for the Barnum Bailey and Shrine circuses.

Playing the bugle, Edwards said, is harder than it looks. The oversized horn Edwards uses is three and one-half feet long and has two valves (trumpets have three).

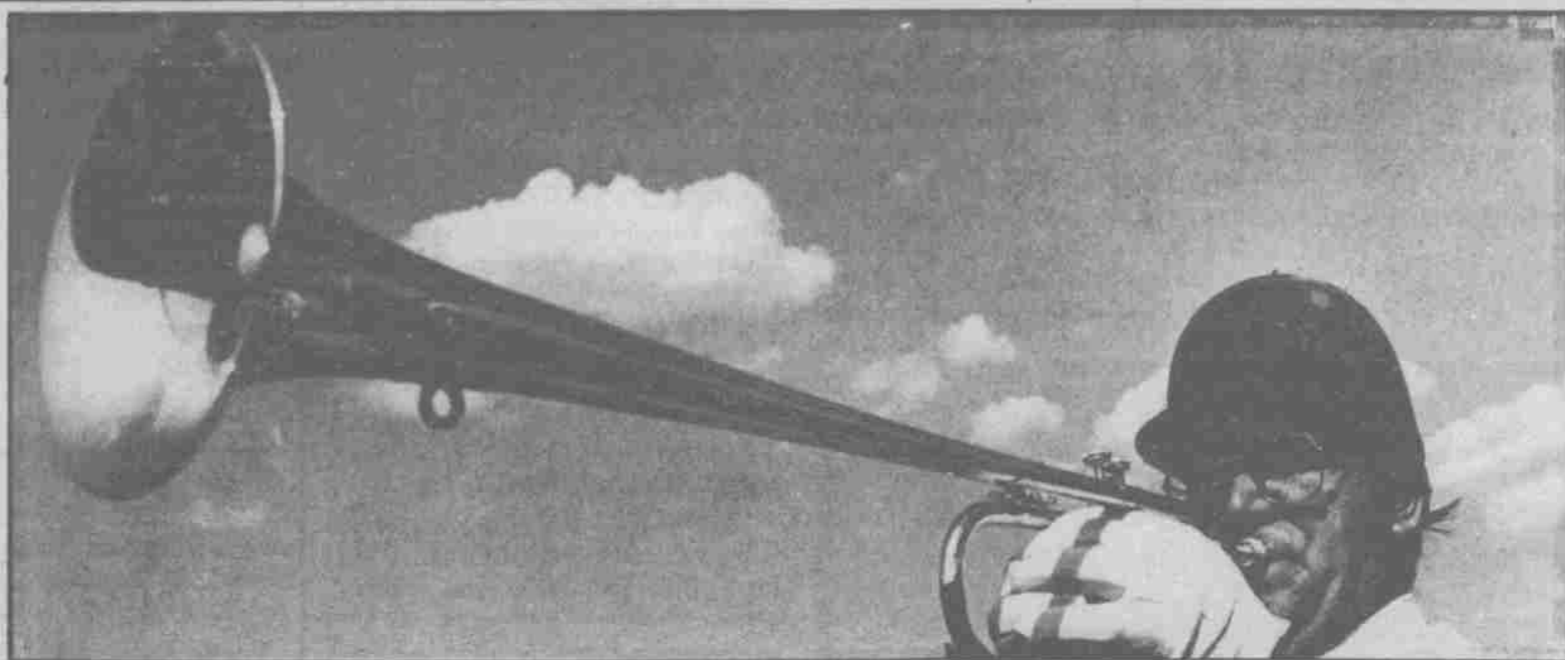
Kool, who substitutes for Edwards, adds that weather conditions (the bugler appears rain or shine), background noise and the size of the crowd complicate performances.

"There's nobody to look at if you get lost," Kool said. "A lot of people can play it (the "Call to Post") but they don't always seem to be able to play it out here."

As principal bugler, Edwards said, he enjoys a certain amount of prestige.

"People come up and give me compliments," he said. "(but) when you goof up you hear that too."

Kool is less overwhelmed by the crowd's response. "Most of the time they don't know I'm there."



Mark Davis/The Nebraskan

Top to Bottom, John Kool warns of post time, a close race excites adrenelin, and Donald Phillip and Willie Mann watch the odds board as the summer rolls by at Ak-Sar-Ben.

## Racetrackers: Vagabond technicians

By Lise Olsen  
Senior Reporter

When Jane Bitney graduated from high school, she wasn't ready to go to college. She went to the racetrack instead.

In the fall of 1980, the UNL pre-veterinary major started working as a groom in Lincoln's fairground stables. In the last five years, she's worked at tracks throughout Nebraska and in

Chicago as a groom, an assistant trainer and a test barn technician. This summer, Bitney is selling mutual tickets at a Minnesota track.

"It really gets in your blood," she said.

In the beginning, she was attracted to track life by the promise of travel and excitement — and the salary, she said.

"A groom makes a couple hundred a week, plus steaks when your horse wins," Bitney said. But what has made

her stay in horse racing for so long is the track atmosphere, the horses and the people.

"I probably made more friends the first day at the racetrack than in the rest of my life," Bitney said.

Racetrackers come from all walks of life. They're English teachers, real estate agents and Australians, Bitney said. Racetrackers are a closely knit group, Bitney said. Newcomers often have initiations. They might be sent for the saddle stretcher or the key to the

quarterpole (non-existent items).

Racetrackers are also superstitious, Bitney said. Black cats are forbidden at the track, and when its time to move to another track, brooms are left behind. It is also bad luck to leave straw in a pitchfork, Bitney said, although she admits it might have been her boss's ploy to get her to work harder rather than a real superstition.

Working hard, long hours, seven days a week, 365 days a year is part of a

road, Bitney would often live in a track's tack room (equipment room) about half the size of a single garage.

"You put your cot up, throw a rug on the floor and call it home," Bitney said.

For convenience, most tracks have laundry and kitchen facilities. The Chicago track, has separate quarters (from the horse stables) for track workers which are "Holiday-Inn-ish," Bitney said.

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